



The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child

ISSN: 0079-7308 (Print) 2474-3356 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/upsc20>

The One-Parent Child and His Oedipal Development

Peter B. Neubauer

To cite this article: Peter B. Neubauer (1960) The One-Parent Child and His Oedipal Development, *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 15:1, 286-309, DOI: [10.1080/00797308.1960.11822580](https://doi.org/10.1080/00797308.1960.11822580)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00797308.1960.11822580>



Published online: 10 Feb 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 22 View citing articles [↗](#)

THE ONE-PARENT CHILD AND HIS OEDIPAL DEVELOPMENT

PETER B. NEUBAUER, M.D. (New York)¹

Over the years, we have been able to study children at the Child Development Center, who, throughout their early development, or for a prolonged part of it, have been deprived of either their mother or father. Their cases present a chance for the analytic study of "experiments provided by fate" (A. Freud and Dann, 1951).

We have had the opportunity to observe in four such children the effects which the absence of one parent had on the vicissitudes of oedipal development. These observations permit us to test the degree to which the physical and emotional presence of both parents is essential for the solution of the oedipal conflict. This, then, is a study of environmental deficiency coordinated to a specific developmental phase.

Reviewing the literature on children who grew up with only one parent, we find that attention has been paid mainly to the pre-oedipal period, and recently more to the first year of life, particularly to the absence of mothering in the need-satisfying phase and its effect on further development. These studies of maternal deprivation, as summarized by Bowlby (1951) and by Glaser and Eisenberg (1956), demonstrate the inexorability with which the infant requires need satisfaction through one consistent, empathetic mother; if the infant's needs are not fulfilled, e.g., through separation from the mother in the first year of life, his future may be threatened by vegetative dysfunction, and disturbance in object relations and ego structure. However, it is impressive to note the wide range of chil-

¹ Director, Child Development Center, New York, N.Y.

The Child Development Center is a research and treatment center for prelatency children and their families. The children attend a therapeutic nursery school daily, over a period of several years. The nursery school is an integral part of the Center's clinical program.

I am grateful to Sylvia Bauman for contributing much of the clinical material and to Rena Wallant who aided as a research assistant.

dren's reactions to maternal deprivation (Goldfarb, 1947; Beres and Obers, 1950). In some cases we see the possibilities of apparent recovery and reversibility of damage, either when the mother figure is restored (Spitz and Wolf, 1946) or when special therapeutic techniques intervene (Gelinier-Ortigue and Aubry, 1955; Alpert, 1957, 1959). We note also the provocative evidence from other cultures that children may develop stable personalities if they have *many* good (that is, constant) mothers (Mead, 1954a); that such children are able to "tolerate separation much more easily because they trust more people" (Mead, 1954b); and the suggestion from a study of Kibbutz children who, according to Kaffman (1956), have "a more balanced reaction to the trauma of a temporary or permanent separation from one of the parents." Yet, we cannot fail to consider the breakdown at puberty in the "concentration camp children" studied by Anna Freud (1954; A. Freud and Dann, 1951) of the "precarious normality" developed on the basis of object relations to group companions, in the absence of individual parental ties.

Bowlby (1951) summarized the number of variables on which the effect of early maternal deprivation depends: the age at which it occurs, the length and degree of deprivation, the quality of the previous mother-child relationship, and the availability of mother substitutes. Other yet barely measured variables, such as the varying cultural demands on individuals, and the constitutional "object-seeking" strength of the child himself, may play a part. Nevertheless, one may conclude that ego development will be jeopardized if the psychobiological unity of mother and child is seriously disturbed in the first year of life, because of the consequent interference with drive satisfaction.

As indicated, our own study deals with the effect of disturbances in the oedipal triangle, and the variety of oedipal solutions adopted by children under these conditions. We will attempt, then, to single out the effect of parental absence during the oedipal phase of development, a step which may permit a closer examination of processes of sexual identification and superego formation.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

We found references to "oedipal deficiency" in several discussions of pathological sexual and social development. Freud, in his

study of Leonardo da Vinci (1910)—whose “illegitimate birth deprived him of his father’s influence until perhaps his fifth year, and left him open to the tender seductions of a mother whose only solace he was”—describes a type of male homosexuality in which etiological factors are the maternal seduction of a son because of the libidinal shift from husband to child, and the absence of paternal influence on oedipal development. In the 1915 edition of *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud continues this thought. Investigating patients with hysteria, he states that “the early loss of one of their parents, whether by death, divorce or separation, with the result that the remaining parent absorbs the whole of the child’s love, determines the sex of the person who is later to be chosen as a sexual object and may thus open the way to permanent inversion.”

Ferenczi (1914) refers to the absent-parent condition by emphasizing a fixation on the lost father in the early histories of male homosexuals, due to the absence of the otherwise “unavoidable conflicts between father and son.” The same process is investigated by Aichhorn (1925) who is impressed by the inadequate ego ideal of the young, fatherless boy. Melanie Klein (as reported by Susan Isaacs, 1943) stresses that the inverted oedipus complex is reinforced in boys by the *fantasy image* of an absent father (both idealized and sadistic). In his paper, “Specific Forms of the Oedipus Complex” (1931), Fenichel adds other important factors: the guilt engendered by fantasy fulfillment of oedipal wishes when the same-sexed parent dies; and the fantastic idealization, based on unsatisfied oedipal longing, when the opposite-sexed parent dies.

The observations of fatherless children in the wartime Hampstead Nurseries made by Anna Freud and Burlingham (1943, 1944) are perhaps the best-known recent contributions to this topic. The intense and persistent attachments to a fantasied father which these children constructed out of even the most meager relationships to any man, or even in the absence of any father experience at all, state the case in reverse: they seem to indicate that children in the oedipal phase are compelled to create in fantasy what does not exist in fact. In an extension of this point, Nunberg (1955) views the idealized fantasy of missing fathers as a bridge to an attachment to a real man, through whom some children may achieve oedipal and superego

development. He points out, though, that other children who grow up without fathers are full of resentment, behave ruthlessly, as if they had no guilt, and thus take revenge on the world for not having a father.

A search of the literature for clinical investigations of the oedipal irregularity of the one-parent relationship has yielded five male and five female cases, published between 1930 and 1954.² Two authors report the analyses of prelatency children (Isaacs, 1943; Meiss, 1952); one the treatment of a latency boy of poor ego endowment and barely average intelligence (who had also been studied intensively between the age of sixteen months and four years) (Bennett and Hellman, 1951); one the treatment of an adolescent girl (Keiser, 1953); the rest of the patients are all adults (Eisendorfer, 1943 [two cases]; Fenichel, 1930; Isaacs, 1945; Reich, 1954; Wulff, 1942). Of the five male cases four lost their fathers, one his mother; of the five women, the father was absent in every case. The ten patients were all without one parent throughout the oedipal phase; however, in all but two of the cases, the loss of the parent had occurred before the oedipal phase.

Despite the considerable variability of data, it is important to summarize these cases, in order to place our own material in its proper perspective.

The single parent's overcathexis and consequent seduction of the child described by Freud may be considered as the prototype. In several of the cases listed above, this process of overcathexis began at birth or before the second year. Some investigators have detailed the elaboration which the preoedipal pathology received in the phallic-oedipal phase. Thus, Eisendorfer (1943) describes the course of development in two women under the twin conditions of any early, abnormally intensified mother-child relationship and an absent father: an increased primary homosexual attachment to the mother occurred, with oral fixations, an immature ego structure, and repression of aggression against the mother which was then inevitably turned inward. With the onset of the phallic phase, the girl experienced her mother as a castrating, phallic figure, and withdrew to a secondary homosexual pattern in which she identified with a fan-

²I have included only those cases in which the effect of parental absence on oedipal development is central to the author's investigation.

tasied image of the absent father in order to retain the love of the mother. "The unresolved conflicts of oral dependence, oral defiance, and oral aggression resulted in the development of an intensified oral annihilating superego structure." Eisendorfer concludes that "one of the important conditions for being loved in these single-parent situations is the identification with the absent parent: a homosexual bond is thus established between the patient and the remaining parent."

Similar early processes of maternal narcissistic seduction, oral fixation, retarded ego controls, and repressed pregenital aggression are described by Annie Reich (1954). The pathology of this young woman patient was dominated by a readiness for fantasy wish fulfillment: the young girl's early identification with a glorified fantasy of the father's phallus persisted in the ego ideal. She thereby hoped to fulfill the explicit familial demand that she replace her dead father (and an uncle who had died at the same time as well!).

Any desexualization of the fantasy became impossible. No stable identification with nonsexual qualities of the objects could be attained, since the child was . . . trying to identify with objects that existed in her fantasy only. The normal impact of reality on this fantasy object, which would have helped to achieve some degree of desexualization and also to reduce to normal size the figure of the father that was seen in such supernatural dimensions was absent . . . hence the unsublimated phallic character of the ego ideal and its megalomaniac scope. [Reich concludes:] When early identifications with unsublimated sexual behavior have taken place and sexual characteristics as such remain an ego ideal, a fixation on or regression to primitive, aggressive, pregenital levels is frequent, which leads to a persistence of particular, cruel superego forerunners. This combination of opposite factors—of megalomaniac, sexualized ideals and of particular, sadistic superego elements—must lead to a type of superego which cannot possibly be lived up to in reality [pp. 236-237].

The idealization of a dead father, as a young boy's defense against early maternal seduction, contributed to the homosexuality of one of Isaacs' patients (1945). His secret hatred and resentment against a mother who had demanded not only his exclusive devotion, but that he share her hatred of his dead father as well, made it too dangerous for him to love another woman, lest this new love bring with it

the same fear and hatred as the old. Never daring to withdraw love from his mother lest the hatred escape, he turned instead to idealized and sadistic love relationships with men, reflecting his secret, chronically disappointed search for his idealized absent father.

The difficulties in normal masculine development in the absence of the oedipal rival and an object for identification are stressed in Bennett and Hellman's (1951) study of an illegitimate boy. Intense fantasies of both an extremely idealized and extremely punitive father helped him avoid the anxieties of the near-fulfillment of his incestuous wishes through his mother's seduction. This mother was hostile to men, and also, her "excessive oral stimulation and physical contact . . . throughout and beyond the oedipal phase, had resulted in fantasies of her as a sadistic phallic mother"; therefore, the boy felt that "any heterosexual fantasies about her can only be fraught with danger for his masculinity." In flight from his "castrating" mother, the boy developed homosexual fantasies toward his father. The punitive, destructive father image expressed his oedipal jealousy and fears of punishment; the strong, benevolent protective fantasy father helped him deny castration danger at the hands of father and from mother as well.

The development of a young man's overt homosexuality is traced by Wulff (1942). This single example of an absent mother is significant because, unlike all other cases, there is no mention of a fantasy replacement of the absent parent. Wulff describes a peculiar oedipal constellation of an absent mother (she died when the child was four but was chronically hospitalized before that) and a seductive and punitive father, who became the boy's primary object. Later heterosexual strivings in this boy could not compete with his "subservience to the original homosexual love object."

Two other cases illustrate that the pattern of the remaining parent's seduction of the child is by no means universal. In another of Isaacs' patients (1943), an uncle, serving as father substitute, is the dominant object in a boy's early life. The boy's oedipal relationships were additionally complicated by the fact that his uncle had two women to look after—aunt and mother. The early loss of his father had enhanced the boy's frightening impulses about him; these, together with an intense longing for him, emphasized the boy's

homosexual attachment to the uncle. His mother's restrictiveness and her hostility to the boy's maleness had a further inhibiting effect; and his uncle's "two wives," exemplifying that it is possible to rob the mother of the father's love, stimulated even more the inverted oedipus complex.

An example of Fenichel's (1930) illustrates the familiar distortion of development due to the persistence of a girl's preoedipal tie to her mother. In this case, an ambivalent, disappointing mother and a totally ungratified child present conditions opposite to those previously described, but with similar effects: the child's longing for love was frustrated on all levels; her aggression against the mother was repressed; she turned to an identification with the idealized fantasy of the father who had died the day she was born, only to be always disappointed since no man could be the right one. Her sadistic relationships to real men ultimately screened the primary unfulfilled wishes for her mother.

I have found only two examples in which the effect of the loss of oedipal objects can be compared with the influence of fantasy objects. These illustrate that the loss of a parent during the oedipal phase intensifies the fears and wishes of an already existing positive oedipus complex. Moreover, it leads to a readiness for the fixation of those conflicts which were uppermost in the parent-child relationship at the time of the parent's disappearance.

Keiser (1953) describes the manifest oedipus complex of an adolescent girl whose father left when she was four. Her superego defect had its genesis in the missing opportunity to desexualize the original oedipal attachment. The father "was neither a dead parent whom the child mourned and finally forgave, nor was he present for a real relationship with its frustrations, which lead to the ultimate resolution of the oedipus complex." He remained a sexualized image, perpetuated by his own partially seductive, partially disappointing behavior (tempting her from afar with the fantasy of his return but never keeping any promises) and kept alive also by the mother, to remove the girl as a rival for her lovers.

Meiss (1952) describes the development of a boy who lost his father during the oedipal period. The absence of continued real experiences with a father made it impossible for the boy to correct his image of an omniscient, angry father, an image formed at a time

when he had already wanted to replace the father. This child's case was further complicated by an unusual symptom: a fear that his mother would die. His anxiety state thus had a twofold origin: his father's death had intensified and fixated his oedipal rivalry and castration fears; in contrast, his fears in relation to his mother derived, not from death wishes against her, but from the fantasy that her death would reunite her with father, thus leaving him totally alone.

This detailed survey of ten cases cannot fail to impress upon us the pathogenic potential which an absent parent may exert on sexual identification and superego formation. In this small sample, the antecedent factors of an early loss of one parent and a pathological preoedipal relationship to the other parent predominate. The data do not permit etiological differentiation between the effect of the parent's absence and the pathology of the remaining parent. Other significant variables in the oedipal development of children with only one parent are the timing of the loss, and the relationship of the child's sex to the sex of the missing parent. Fantasy objects, immensely idealized or endowed with terribly sadistic attributes, replacing an absent parent are nearly ubiquitous; their frequent occurrence in dynamically very different situations underlines their significance in the development of object relations.

The case I shall present belongs to the category of those children who grew up with only one parent.

CASE HISTORY

Rita M. was brought to us by her mother in July, 1955, at the age of three years six months. The mother's difficulties were expressed in the three problems which concerned her most: (1) how to deal with the disinterested, absent father, and Rita's questions about and wish for him; (2) the excessive eating, which Mrs. M. considered to be a forerunner to Rita's becoming a fat, ugly child, as she describes herself as having been. In this connection, Mrs. M. expressed guilt about the punitive way in which she handled the eating problem; and (3) Rita's sexual confusion and expressed wish to be a boy, which Mrs. M. felt at a complete loss to deal with.

The mother's stated purpose in turning to us was to find out how to be a better mother. It was felt from the very beginning that

Mrs. M. had some awareness that Rita's problems were her own as well, and there was little doubt that she was seeking treatment for herself.

Our attempts to include Mr. M. in the study failed. He was frank about his total lack of interest in Rita; he visited Rita at school once, but otherwise refused to cooperate with us in any planning or in any sustained relationship with the child.

I shall list only a few facts about the mother, although we have a wealth of data about her. Mrs. M.'s father had failed her in many respects. At the age of four, moreover, she had lost an uncle to whom she had transferred her oedipal attachment. Thus she longed for an acceptance she never received. Mrs. M. had had a lonely childhood, had felt herself unloved and unwanted.

When she married her husband, she saw him as a "strong, dynamic man," in contrast to her own weak father. With this fantasy she blinded herself to the many psychopathic manifestations which were abundantly clear to all who knew him. She had supported him by working as a bookkeeper, and after their divorce she continued to work because Mr. M. constantly failed in his very minimal legal financial obligations to Rita and her mother, frequently omitting his payments, issuing bad checks, and so on. The mother's inability to let go of her divorced husband was an important factor in Rita's development.

Mrs. M.'s two pregnancies prior to Rita's birth, both of which terminated in early miscarriage—as well as the successful one with Rita—were frankly initiated by her conscious wish to have Mr. M. assume the responsibilities of marriage and by the vain hope that the birth of a child would transform him into a reliable husband. He desired only a son, but her own preference was for a girl. Rita was born at the beginning of the ninth month. Though the mother had never considered breast feeding, Rita's premature birth made this an academic question. Mrs. M. expressed her sadness at not being able to feed or hold Rita or take her home from the hospital when she left. She was alone for the next few weeks, because the father had already left.

The growth history is marked by rather rapid physical strides.

Frequent and early separations, not merely from the father, were prominent in Rita's early life. At two months of age, she was taken

to the home of a maternal aunt for a week while Mrs. M. went away to determine the future of her marriage, deciding to agree to a divorce. Again, when Rita was four months old, she was placed with the same aunt for the summer to permit Mrs. M. to keep her job in the city. On week ends, she joined the baby in her sister's household. Removing Rita from the aunt's care, Mrs. M. took her back to New York and a part-time housekeeper was engaged to help. This woman remained in the home until some time in Rita's second year, when Jean, the current housekeeper, took over. Jean, a woman in her fifties, is present during the day, but returns to her own household each evening. Rita has always been strongly attached to Jean, who appears to be overly permissive with her, in contrast to Mrs. M., who is the partial and unsuccessful disciplinarian. In June, 1955, the housekeeper became ill. Mrs. M. was unable to find a temporary substitute for her, and a hasty decision was made to place Rita in a day nursery from 8:20 A.M. to 6:00 P.M.

Rita's father, who had begun a clandestine affair during his wife's pregnancy, left one week after she was born, excusing his departure with, "This is a good time to leave, before I establish a relationship with the child." He had, as we have stated before, expressed preference for a boy, and his aversion to accepting a daughter has never diminished. He has visited her only twice, on her second and third birthdays, and then only upon the mother's insistence.

We find Rita, at the age of three and a half, approaching phallic development. Her previous longing for her absent father now changed to overidealized fantasies about him, accompanied by sexual confusion, expressed in her preference to be a boy. At this time, too, begin the bouts of excessive eating; the complaints of feeling itchy, of her clothes being too tight or too rough; and an intensified meticulousness. These are connected with earlier prephallic problems, such as difficulties in feeding, skin sensitivities, and concern that doors and drawers be closed, or rugs and blankets be smooth. While in the past she had accepted many important separations from her mother without showing overt signs of being disturbed, now she reacted with severe anxiety.³

³ The emergence of Rita's separation anxiety as an expression of phallic conflicts may contribute to the understanding of this symptom in those children whose castration fear reinforces the fear of loss of the object. A similar constellation existed in Meiss's case (1952) previously cited.

The shift toward phallic conflicts with increasing symptomatology had been precipitated by traumatic events, almost in the sense Freud used the term originally. Her mother's inability to leave her job, when her housekeeper was suddenly hospitalized, required Rita's hasty and unprepared placement in a day nursery. After a week of apparent adjustment to the nursery (as to previous separations), Rita began to plead to be permitted to stay at home. We learned later that during this week she was exposed to other children's sexual exploration, to which she reacted by saying, "Last week I was a boy," and on several occasions, "I lost my penis." Mounting separation anxiety and increased masturbation accompanied these castration fantasies. When she was asked by other children in the school to dress up as a bride in a wedding game, she complained, "I don't want to get married," and continued to beg her mother to be permitted to stay at home. When this request was ignored, she had to be carried screaming into the school bus. Finally, she continued, forced separations culminated in a furious outburst. Upon her return home at the end of the second week of school, she would not talk, attacked mother physically, and refused to enter the apartment. Forced to do so, she exploded in a scene that took hours to run its course. She took off all her clothes, screamed, and sat down on the floor to urinate. Mother, who had been withholding the desperately sought protection from both castration and separation anxiety, each heightening the other, now began to panic when she was faced with this massive disorganization and regression. Supported by her pediatrician's advice, she turned for help to her divorced husband (an idealized expectation on her part in view of her past disappointment in him) and insisted that he visit the child.

The father, who a month before these events had remarried a woman with a nine-year-old son, responded to the urgency of mother's request and visited Rita twice in the following week. It is of interest, in view of Rita's further oedipal development, that as soon as the father joined them, she now banished her mother into another room with the same determination with which she had previously fought separation from mother. Alone with her father, she immediately acted on phallic impulses, nagging so insistently that he urinate in her presence, that he allowed her into the bath-

room with him. Stimulated by Rita's phallic wishes and fears, he responded with his own sexual pathology: he played with her roughly, pulled her hair, and teased her with taunts of "Hey, boy!" She protested, "No, no, no, don't say that," clung to him when he left, and once again separation from him had to be forced.

Rita's wish for a penis was accompanied by increasing castration anxiety. We are not sure of the extent to which her identification with this mother prepared her for the fantasy of a phallic girl, or whether the penis envy was stimulated primarily by the exposure at school to the anatomical differences, as expressed in sexual games to which she, a fatherless, only child, may have come unprepared. The mother not only failed to permit the prephallic regression which might have protected Rita against the castration fear, but she also set the example of the powerless woman who has to be rescued by the man. Rita tried to turn away from her mother and seek help from her father. But then she had to face the specific condition for his acceptance—that she be a boy. The wish for a penis, therefore, was a defense against the castration anxiety, as well as the only means at her disposal to reunite with father; the wish was not only to be *like* father, but to be *with* father. In this case, the penis envy was in the service of the positive oedipal relationship.

The confluence of various factors—the traumatic separation from mother, the sudden appearance of father with his pathological behavior, and the child's developmental readiness—raised these questions: Would this have a fixating effect on the phallic level of development? Would it force regression, or would it exert a precipitous, premature push toward the unfolding of pathological oedipal processes? The case material of others suggests that this constellation of forces is a dynamic precondition of homosexuality. In our case, interestingly enough, the most telling influence in this direction stemmed, not from the remaining parent, but from the almost totally absent father. His absence was naturally only a physical one; in the emotional life of both mother and child he was very much a part of everyday wishful thinking.

One could speculate that it may have been fortunate for Rita that the father continued to visit only on very rare occasions; otherwise, he might have reinforced her phallic readiness, and brought about a fixation on that level. Since he remained absent, Rita was

kept uncomfortably poised between the wish to defend against both the phallic overidealized longing for her father, and her reality dependency on mother. She did not react to this with regression, nor was she able to make a choice between accepting castration or insisting on the fantasy penis; therefore, the phallic ambivalence remained suspended.

Before her father visited, Rita's initial reaction to her phallic confusion was regression to a demanding, pregenital relationship to mother. But meeting disappointment, she turned toward the oedipal choice; indeed, in Freud's words (1932), "as though it were a haven of refuge." The father's implicit demand, however, that she would be acceptable to him only as a boy, imposed upon her a narcissistic type of object choice (Freud, 1914):⁴ to love, in effect, what someone else wanted her to be. Thus, for the next two years, Rita tried to live up to her one-sided bargain with father, to become a boy in order to maintain his love. She preferred pants to dresses; in the Child Development Center's nursery, she played the role of a father or a cowboy; and she augmented the masculine fantasy with belligerent, demanding, controlling behavior (though this was not without prephallic determinants).

It is dynamically important to emphasize, though, that from the beginning on, she was never fully at ease with the wish for a penis. The uneasiness of her phallic identification was expressed in her attempted retreat from facing issues of sexual identity ("I don't want to get married!"); in her initial protest ("No, no, no, don't say that!") when father proposed that she be a boy; and in the increased symptoms of compulsive behavior and skin sensitivity, when she finally "tried on" the phallic fantasy. Though her attempt at phallic completion brought no acceptance from father, which increased her anxiety, she continued to endow him, as the possessor of the penis, with the omnipotent capacity to bring her happiness. This image did not change with his disappointing, often cynically rejecting

⁴ Freud states: "We may conclude . . . with a short survey of the paths leading to object-choice. A person may love:

- (1) According to the narcissistic type:
 - (a) What he is himself (actually himself).
 - (b) What he once was.
 - (c) What he would like to be.
 - (d) Someone who was once part of himself" (p. 47).

attitude; he remained in her fantasy a protective, all-loving, all-powerful figure. The idealization was so nearly complete that when he broke a promise to visit her in the Center's nursery, she claimed he had come, but at rest period or lunchtime, and therefore the teachers were not permitted to allow him in. (Characteristically, as I shall amplify later, this invasion of reality testing by idealization was balanced by her need to include rules and regulations to justify the fantasied behavior of the teachers.)

During this period, a cyclical pattern became evident. Any separation from mother (and later from the therapist), or any physical illness, brought an intensification of castration fear and an increase in symptoms: itching, temper tantrums, a shift to aggression, and a new attempt to reach the father (a repetition of the original traumatic sequence). Since she had tried to fulfill father's wishes, and he still had not satisfied hers, she then sought other solutions, which were expressed in her fantasies in treatment. For instance, she played that she herself was a man who had a baby boy, who "cried because he had no mother," and later, "because he had no father." As a man, she could "produce" a boy, but then she, as a girl, was still without a father. As a boy, she would have to make a choice to give up mother and stay with father; this forced her to change the child's sex back to a girl, and then back and forth again, interminably. We see, in her contradictory phallic wishes, her inability to find a solution; and ambivalence, in her need for both parents.

Aggression—the killing of a parent—was introduced into her play when all attempts at a peaceful solution had failed. In kidnapping fantasies, the "bad" father-cowboy came each night, killed mother, and stole her away. As further material came to the fore, it appeared that, in her view, to be aggressive meant to be like a man and to turn against mother. This phallic aggression became mixed with oral and anal conflicts, as expressed in temper tantrums, demandingness, enuresis, and itching. When she was good, mother would take care of her, but there was another alternative, namely, to be sick. In her play there was an itching baby, who could not be taken care of by mother; only a doctor, a cowboy, or some other father figure could cure it. Her emerging concepts of good and bad therefore stemmed from her relationship to mother. When she was aggressive-phallic, she became bad, in mother's eyes, and acceptable to father.

It is important to investigate these identifications in order to understand Rita's superego development. In comparison to Nunberg's formulation (1932), that the boy's ego ideal is formed by the love of the mother and then followed by the fear of the father which leads to superego formation, we find the following process in Rita: while the father was physically absent, he was very much a part of her emotional life and represented direct wish fulfillment; when the mother became the object of aggression, good or bad was connected with mother's acceptance or nonacceptance. Rita expected punishment for instinctual wishes to come from the mother, who thereby reinforced the already existing castration fear. In this way, mother counteracted Rita's phallic identification, and consequently also father's influence. Being a model of a woman who seeks and longs for a man, mother influenced Rita's ultimate heterosexual position.

There seems to be an additional source of superego formation. Suspended between dependency on mother and the wish for the phallic father, Rita could not shift toward the oedipal organization, and could not give her loyalty or allegiance to either mother or father. She saw the family as falling into groups of two; we have noted her dichotomous tie to boy and father, girl and mother; as a boy, father would stay with her, as a girl, she could stay only with mother. But needing both parents, she incorporated a sort of uneasily balanced double identity: she was at times a boy, and at times a girl. An early interest in and appreciation of numerical and arithmetical concepts expressed her concern with these problems of equalization and distribution⁵—a concern which she translated into a precociously developed sense of social equivalents, namely, prematurely strict ideals of correctness, justice, and equal status. We have to assume that originally anal difficulties have contributed to this morality, which no doubt now assumed phallic significance. We see, therefore, the beginning of a superego formation, based not on the oedipal conflict but on preoedipal ambivalence, on the sublimation of her phallic suspension. This resembles Nunberg's patient (1949) who felt "that his entire body is divided into two halves," "that it is dual" . . . man has two arms, two eyes, two ears, and so on! Nunberg, viewing this

⁵ V. Rosen (1953) and E. and R. Plank (1954) have discussed mathematical interests of still other derivation.

material as a manifestation of the bisexuality of man, states that these hermaphroditic fantasies attempt to solve the problem of the origin of man and the difference between the sexes.

Her ambivalent, see-sawing identification did not permit her to rest with the fantasy that father stole the baby; she continued the play by reinstating mother who then, in turn, had to steal the baby back. Unresolved struggles between the parents for the child continued with wearisome repetitiveness, until the anxiety engendered by the continuous necessity to choose one parent and thereby separate from the other finally forced Rita to flight into fairy-tale-like fantasies of a complete, happy family. Characteristically, this had to be a family of four, in which, in addition to mother and father, there was almost always a brother, and then Rita could comfortably become the girl. Only then did she find magical peace; then there was calm and order, as if she had already reached the latency period. Now that there was a girl *and* a boy, everyone was happy; each had what he wanted. This had the trappings of an oedipal position; sexual roles became neatly and correctly differentiated: "Father will be Mr.; mother, Mrs.; and I shall be Miss." She added to these seemingly oedipal fantasies that she would grow up to become "a mommy with three little girls and three little boys, and five little girls and five little boys." It was as if her bisexual condition was resolved by the equal distribution of each sex. This need for regularity and order had surely been influenced by her obsessive and compulsive traits which she had carried into the phallic conflict. It was important to realize that the idealization of father had spread to the *idealization of this complete family*, in which oedipal rivalry, jealousy, and true identification have by avoidance led to premature pseudo solutions.

In this fantasy of a larger family, the boy would bring the father back. Her acceptance of a boy corresponded to an expansion of her relationships in the nursery group. She now could accept the attentions of a boy, a much-sought-after oedipal partner for the other girls, but their relationship was mainly nonsexualized in nature. If we view this as a parallel to the family fantasies, he was accepted only as a sibling to gain father. Confirmation that this maneuver resolved her ambivalence and permitted her to see herself again as a girl lies in the resultant decreased symptomatology: an easing of her need to

control, a release of tension, and a marked relaxation in the nursery.

The mother's plan to remarry when Rita was six years old gave us an additional opportunity to study the development of this child. We had several questions in mind: Would she continue to cling to the fantasied image of her father, particularly since she had neither introduced substitute fathers into her play, nor had she in reality formed any attachment to another man; or would she shift her relationship to a stepfather and then continue with him where she had left off with father, namely, to seek phallic completion from him, and with it return to the original behavior of the banishment of her mother when her father first visited? Would she regress, or how far would she progress toward facing a true oedipal conflict in the continuous presence of a man?

For a short period after her prospective stepfather was introduced, oedipal conflicts flared up, with Rita vascillating between not wanting to lose mother to this man, and then wanting him for herself. (Perhaps the stepfather contributed to oedipal stimulation by wooing the mother through the daughter, as one frequently finds under these circumstances.) But the idealization of her complete family soon reasserted itself, supported perhaps by finding in her stepfather's own children the siblings she had prepared for so well in her play. Very much to the relief of mother and stepfather, Rita became a good girl, that is to say, obedient, happy, wishing for the marriage and thereby an early realization of her family dream. After the marriage, her general mood continued to be cheerful and affectionate; she found new friends and seemingly made a good adjustment to the new home and school. We see, then, that her fantasy family had become so cathected that reality was used to support the fantasy rather than to correct it. We had expected that the man who would take part in her real life, unable to live up to idealization, would have to disappoint her, and that this disappointment would be necessary to correct her fantasies and contribute to normal development. Instead, she transferred the idealization of her father to her stepfather; *he* then became the object of her fantasies, whereas it was her fantasy father who disappointed her. The disappointment, therefore, was experienced due to the shift of cathexis from one fantasy father to another but not due to reality testing. It seems that reality came too late to disengage this process. When the idealization

was shifted, her own father became the stranger. This was strikingly demonstrated when she was actually confronted with him again at adoption proceedings. At first she did not know him, but when she recognized him finally, she commented critically, "I didn't remember that he had such an ugly nose!" With the shift of cathexis, her father then became devalued, as unreal in the negative sense as he had been before in the positive.

As to the question of oedipal progression, we had no indication that she was able to use her new family to work through her oedipal conflicts. Jealousy, rivalry, fears of castration, and the other oedipal concomitants remained absent.

At seven, Rita is without striking clinical symptomatology. Her sexual identification has proceeded from the initial phallic ambivalence to that of a pseudo-latency girl, without her ever having truly mastered the oedipal conflict. Her superego development is based on anal conflicts and emerged from phallic ambivalence. Her rivalry with mother was too short-lived; castration fear was insufficiently mastered to permit realistic integration through guilt with its anticipation of punishment.

DISCUSSION

We shall now compare our clinical material with similar studies in the literature. Though the cases described do not show a unique clustering of symptoms, there is characteristic pathology of phallic fixations, whether the parent of the same or opposite sex is absent, leading to homosexuality; and superego disturbances, expressed in either a too severe superego with sadistic features of a harsh, pre-oedipal quality, or a deficient superego which allows incestuous acting out. There seem to be a number of dynamic factors which have a decisive influence on the child's development. The most conspicuous one is the remaining parent who, in this sample, was seen to be the preoedipal seducer of the child. This factor is not significant when the child loses a parent after he has reached the oedipal position—a finding which emphasizes the significance of the timing of the loss. The patients of Meiss (1952) and Keiser (1953) each reacted to the loss of the father with the intensification of already existing oedipal conflicts. Meiss's boy endowed his dead father with magically omnipotent and punitive powers, in the service

of superego demands; Keiser's girl idealized her absent father in the service of libidinal gratification. Each tried to fulfill his developmental requirement—one in relation to the same-sexed parent, the oedipal rival; the other in relation to the opposite-sexed parent, the oedipal object—thus confirming Fenichel's generalization (1931): "when the parent of the child's own sex dies, this is perceived as a fulfillment of the oedipal wish with strong feelings of guilt. If the other parent dies, the oedipal longing which remains unsatisfied leads to the fantastic idealization of the dead parent, and to an increase of the longing. The rest depends upon when and how the parent's death becomes known to the child."

The development of fantasies about the missing parent, mentioned here by Fenichel, is a characteristic finding in the literature I have surveyed. While he delineates only the fantasy idealization of the oedipal object for libidinal gratification, the data already described indicate that fantasies of the missing parent have either an extremely idealized or extremely punitive character, or both, depending not simply on the relation of the child's sex to the sex of the missing parent but on the child's developmental demand in accordance with the timing of the loss. Idealization either of the same-sexed parent (Isaacs, 1945) or of the opposite-sexed parent (Fenichel, 1931) in the service of preoedipal needs may predominate when he is lost early in life.⁶ We can add that "the rest depends" also on the particular relationship to the remaining parent and on other variables as well: whether the lost object has died, and if not, whether he is totally or only partially unavailable. Whatever the weight of any one factor in an individual case, the fantasy replacement of the missing parent, resulting in disturbed object relations, is one of the dynamics most specific to the oedipal development of a child in a one-parent family.

In comparing our case with others, I shall refrain from drawing general conclusions in view of the small sample and the fact that each author investigated different aspects of the problem. However, in evaluating our data, we found several features which differ from the findings in the literature. Disturbances such as severe fixation,

⁶ See also Lewin's report (1937) of the idealization of the same-sexed absent parent (lost between the ages of five to ten) at puberty, as a protection against resurgent incestuous conflicts, intensified by the close relationship to the remaining parent.

homosexuality, and superego deviation to the degree found in other cases were not present. Despite the early absence of the father, his influence proved to be more pathological than that of the remaining parent; in addition to his pathology, the timing of his visits, rather than the timing of separation, intensified the already existing developmental conflicts. Yet our data also confirm that the remaining parent's influence is of great importance, but not as maternal seduction. In Rita's history, the mother's influence explains the relative *health* of the child. Mother, with her heterosexual orientation, and in spite of her oral disturbance which she had transmitted to the child, was able to counteract the father's pathology sufficiently to avoid fixation.

In many of the cases cited, the pathological preoedipal relationship to the remaining parent has been shown to affect the vicissitudes of aggression, thus precluding the development of an oedipal relationship to the primary object. In the case of the girls, what has been described is essentially the arrest of development at the primary homosexual level. Rita's case provides an interesting contrast: she too evades the oedipal conflict, though not through phallic fixation, but through a premature flight into latency as an escape from unendurable phallic ambivalence. Without underestimating the effect of the parent's pathology on the child (either the preoedipal mother, or the absent father in Rita's case), this specific factor should be separated from the more general difficulties in facing the oedipal conflict inherent in the absent-parent situation.

The lack of oedipal stimulation, normally found in the continuous day-to-day interplay between the child and each parent, and especially as evidenced by the relationship of the parents to each other, imposes a primary imbalance. *Synchronization* and dosing of oedipal experiences in a continuous reality context, within which phase-specific events can be absorbed, is not present. In the absence of the parental interplay—that is to say, in the absence of the primal scene with all its social equivalents—developmental forces crystallize too suddenly around events, rather than being slowly but continuously interwoven in experience, and hence have an extraordinarily traumatic effect. Thus, in the phallic phase, Rita reacted with exaggerated intensity to separation from the mother; made an attempt at an intense, precipitous oedipal solution following the discovery

of her anatomical deficiency; and showed readiness to accept her father's suggested cure.

As we have seen, father's presence, fleeting though it was, threw Rita immediately into an oedipal relationship in which she turned her libidinal interests toward him, and her aggression against the mother. But after her father left, continued aggression against the only remaining object proved too dangerous to maintain; thus, we see phallic ambivalence rather than true oedipal choice. It is possible that under these circumstances even the most optimal mother-child relationship is burdened by a desperate *all-or-none quality*, so that the fear of the loss of the only object masks and dominates the reality of the relationship. Repression of aggression against the mother would therefore seem to be almost inevitable, even without the additional reinforcement of phasic fixations. This may explain why we so frequently find a history of so-called seduction of the child by the mother in the absence of a complete family. Freud points out that this seduction is due to the parent's shift of cathexis from the missing partner to the child. We may add here that the child represses the aggression against the remaining parent and thus reinforces the actual or apparent seduction.

In the continued absence of her father, Rita maintained a pre-oedipal relationship to both parents. The father's image was protected from any aggression on her part by the process of idealization. On the other hand, the aggression manifested itself by her using the father as a vehicle for expressing aggression against the mother (see the kidnaping fantasies). In the fantasies of their future which mother and daughter shared, Rita began to consider a new father, but never risked placing herself in a rivalrous position in relation to mother. She demanded a new father from mother as another pre-oedipal supply—"I love you, do you love me? If you loved me enough, you'd get me another daddy!" Significantly, she never had any opportunity to seek a substitute father. If this had been possible, would she have maintained the fantasy of her idealized father and her dependency on mother?

With the repression of aggression, the castration grievance and all the prephallic grievances which it includes remained unresolved; therefore, an oedipal identification with father or mother was impossible. The continued idealization of the absent father in the face of

consistent disappointment finally spread to the image of the family. In her fantasies of a happy family, she established a make-believe world in which comfort and peace were found. Though there was token role-playing in which the sexes of the players were correctly identified, these fantasies never included a true oedipal girl's relationship to the father or an identification with the mother. The family lived happily ever after, but how, we do not know. Without evidence of rivalry with the mother or aggression against either parent with the concomitant guilt, the fantasy of a complete family, from the viewpoint of oedipal development, stops where it should start.

Thus the pseudo-latency solution evades oedipal commitments and betrays its preoedipal origins. Therefore, we can conclude only that the seemingly differentiated representations of self and parents merely cover rather than resolve the phallic ambivalence. When Rita finally found a complete family in reality, idealization of the true father did not lead to disappointment in the stepfather; it seems rather to have perpetuated the state of unrealistic wish fulfillment and contributed to the cathexis of the pseudo-latency imagery. While Rita does not seem to have gross superego deficiency, idealization appears to have impaired reality testing. Hoffer's (1949) differentiation between fantasy and idealization states the process aptly: Idealization, "in contrast to fantasy . . . impels the child to change reality according to his ideals. In his fantasy he turns disappointing parents into satisfactory ones, in idealization he denies what is disappointing without withdrawal from the objects." We are reminded here of the idealization of political leaders, with the same pathology of reality testing and absence of guilt. Greenacre (1959) maintains that the play of children is an attempt to master traumatic experiences under more favorable conditions and therefore is an attempt to establish the sense of reality. Rita's play helped her defenses against injury but did not serve reality testing.

While the absence of a parent in Rita's case has not led to serious pathology, she remains with a developmental deficiency which stems from the lack of having lived through and mastered the oedipal conflict. Jealousy and rivalry, punishment and guilt, instinctual renunciation with resulting ego expansion—these ingredients are missing to provide an adequate texture of the mature psyche,

with its "categorical imperative," won only through oedipal participation and solution.

When a parent is absent, there is an absence of oedipal reality. The absent parent becomes endowed with magical power either to gratify or to punish; aggression against him, and the remaining parent as well, becomes repressed. The cases reported in the literature show that existing oedipal conflicts are intensified when a parent leaves during this period. In Rita's case, in which the father was almost totally absent from birth, we predict an oedipal disturbance, which, though only subclinical in degree, is specific in its textural deficiency. Rita is now in her late latency. Further study of her development is needed before the effects of her early experience can be judged with more assurance. A follow-up in her adolescence is essential to test our evaluation and prediction.

Though we have learned to know children who need little aid in development, whose innate strength can do much with little, there still remains an irreducible minimum. At times during the study of Rita, we stressed this innate factor to explain her strength: her capacity to follow the inner unfolding of the maturational and developmental processes. But, just as the autonomous ego is structured by need satisfaction through mothering, so does, as it seems to us, the oedipal Anlage, "the readiness for oedipal experience" described by Anna Freud (1951), require the stimulation of both parents for the unfolding of all the complexities of the oedipal organization.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aichhorn, A. (1925), *Wayward Youth*. New York: Viking Press, 1935.
- Alpert, A. (1957), A Special Therapeutic Technique for Certain Developmental Disorders in Prelatency Children. *Am. J. Orthopsychiat.*, XXVII.
- (1959), Reversibility of Pathological Fixations Associated with Maternal Deprivation in Infancy. *This Annual*, XIV.
- Bennett, I. & Hellman, I. (1951), Psychoanalytic Material Related to Observations in Early Development. *This Annual*, VI.
- Beres, D. & Obers, S. (1950), The Effects of Extreme Deprivation in Infancy on Psychic Structure in Adolescence: A Study in Ego Development. *This Annual*, V.
- Bowlby, J. (1951), *Maternal Care and Mental Health*. Geneva: World Health Organization Monograph.
- Eisendorfer, A. (1943), The Clinical Significance of the Single Parent Relationship in Women. *Psa. Quart.*, XII.
- Fenichel, O. (1930), The Pregenital Antecedents of the Oedipus Complex. *The Collected Papers of Otto Fenichel*, I. New York: Norton, 1954.
- (1931), Specific Forms of the Oedipus Complex. *The Collected Papers of Otto Fenichel*, I. New York: Norton, 1954.

- Ferenczi, S. (1914), The Nosology of Male Homosexuality (Homoerotism). *Sex in Psychoanalysis*. New York: Basic Books, 1950.
- Freud, A. (1951), Observations on Child Development. *This Annual*, VI.
- (1954), In: Problems of Infantile Neurosis. *This Annual*, IX.
- & Burlingham, D. T. (1943), *War and Children*. New York: International Universities Press.
- (1944), *Infants Without Families*. New York: International Universities Press.
- & Dann, S. (1951), An Experiment in Group Upbringing. *This Annual*, VI.
- Freud, S. (1905), Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. *Standard Edition*, VII. London: Hogarth Press, 1953.
- (1910), Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood. *Standard Edition*, XI. London: Hogarth Press, 1957.
- (1914), On Narcissism: An Introduction. *Collected Papers*, IV. London: Hogarth Press, 1925.
- (1932), The Psychology of Women. *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. New York: Norton, 1932.
- Gelinier-Ortigue, M. & Aubry, J. (1955), Maternal Deprivation, Psychogenic Deafness and Pseudo-Retardation. In: *Emotional Problems of Early Childhood*, ed. G. Caplan. New York: Basic Books.
- Glaser, K. & Eisenberg, L. (1956), Maternal Deprivation. *Pediatrics*, XVIII.
- Goldfarb, W. (1947), Variations in Adolescent Adjustment of Institutionally Reared Children. *Am. J. Orthopsychiat.*, XVII.
- Greenacre, P. (1959), Play in Relation to Creative Imagination. *This Annual*, XIV.
- Hoffer, W. (1949), Deceiving the Deceiver. In: *Searchlights on Delinquency*, ed. K. R. Eissler. New York: International Universities Press.
- Isaacs, S. (1943), An Acute Psychotic Anxiety Occurring in a Boy of Four Years. *Childhood and After*. New York: International Universities Press, 1949.
- (1945), Fatherless Children. *Childhood and After*. New York: International Universities Press, 1949.
- Kaffman, M. (1956), *Investigation of the Behavior of 403 Kibbutz Children*. Israel: Institute for Research in Collective Education.
- Keiser, S. (1953), A Manifest Oedipus Complex in an Adolescent Girl. *This Annual*, VIII.
- Lewin, B. D. (1937), A Type of Neurotic Hypomanic Reaction. *A.M.A. Arch. Neurol. Psychiat.*, XXXVII.
- Mead, M. (1954a), Some Theoretical Considerations on the Problem of Mother-Child Separation. *Am. J. Orthopsychiat.*, XXIV.
- (1954b), In: *Discussions on Child Development* (Proceedings of the World Health Organization Study Group on the Psychobiological Development of the Child), II, ed. J. M. Tanner & B. Inhelder. New York: International Universities Press.
- Meiss, M. (1952), The Oedipal Problem of a Fatherless Child. *This Annual*, VII.
- Nunberg, H. (1932), *Allgemeine Neurosenlehre*. Berne: Huber.
- (1949), *Problems of Bisexuality as Reflected in Circumcision*. London: Imago Publ.
- (1955), *Principles of Psychoanalysis*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Plank, E. N. & Plank, R. (1954), Emotional Components in Arithmetical Learning as Seen Through Autobiographies. *This Annual*, IX.
- Reich, A. (1954), Early Identifications as Archaic Elements in the Superego. *J. Am. Ps. Assn.*, II.
- Rosen, V. (1953), On Mathematical Illumination and the Mathematical Thought Process: A Contribution to the Genetic Development and Metapsychology of Abstract Thinking. *This Annual*, VIII.
- Spitz, R. & Wolf, K. M. (1946), Anaclitic Depression. *This Annual*, II.
- Wulff, M. (1942), A Case of Male Homosexuality. *Int. J. Ps.*, XXIII.